

AN ANALYSIS OF THE EMERGENCE OF TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Strategy

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ABSTRACT

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Transnational terrorism has recently emerged as a serious security threat in Southeast Asia. This thesis examines the conditions, causes, and nature of the transnational terrorist threat in the region. It analyses the historical, political, economic, sociocultural, religious-ethnic, and geostrategic factors in Southeast Asia, and the history, goals, strategy, operations, and transnational relationships of four selected Islamic fundamentalist groups in the region (namely Jemaah Islamiyah, Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia, Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and Laskar Jihad) that contribute to the emergence of the threat. The analysis demonstrates that the underlying conditions and causes are complex, comprising both contributing and countervailing elements. The nature of the threat displays limited indigenous roots, underpinnings of temporal and non-lasting political and economic problems, and strong external influences. It concludes that the emergence of transnational terrorism in Southeast Asia is essentially an external-influenced phenomenon with limited and weak internal coherence, and is therefore not an inherent and irreversible process. A clear understanding of the conditions, causes, and nature of the threat can provide a framework for the development of effective regional and national strategies to combat it.

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ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
DI	Darul Islam
JI	Jemaah Islamiyah
KMM	Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia
LJ	Laskar Jihad
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
SEA	Southeast Asia

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism has gained prominence as a threat to global stability since the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States. Increased international efforts to combat terrorism have uncovered extensive transnational linkages among terrorist organizations throughout the world. In particular, evidence of Al Qaeda's presence and the close linkages among various extremist groups in Southeast Asia (SEA) have surfaced and alarmed governments in the region. SEA has historically been plagued by localized terrorism in individual countries carried out by extremist groups with various political and religious agendas. These threats have largely been confined and handled within the particular country with little impact on the security of the region. However, the divisive and fragile political, economic, social, and security structures in many Southeast Asian countries, which could present fertile grounds for transnational terrorist groups, have led some analysts to label SEA as the second front of the global war against terrorism.

Two recent events corroborate the susceptibility of SEA to the threat of transnational terrorism. In August 2002, Singapore carried out its second arrest of members from Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)--a transnational, clandestine, Islamic fundamentalist group that seeks to create by force an Islamic regime in Muslim-dominated parts of SEA; that is, from southern Thailand through the lower part of the Philippines. The JI members were plotting to bomb the American Embassy and other foreign targets in Singapore. They were also planning to attack the Singapore Defense Ministry and the water pipeline between Singapore and Malaysia so as to instigate a

conflict between the two neighboring countries.¹ In October 2002, Indonesia suffered one of its most severe terrorist attacks on the tourist island of Bali. Two bomb explosions at a popular nightclub killed about 180 people, most of them foreign, primarily Australian, tourists. The terrorist attack in Bali has prompted Indonesian authorities to the existence of transnational terrorists operating in Indonesia² and to undertake various measures to deal with the threat.

The emergence of SEA as a second front in transnational terrorism appears unequivocal. The contributing factors identified by various analysts include SEA's large Muslim population base, its porous borders, large numbers of established Islamic fundamentalist groups with close linkages to one another and other international terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, governments that are unable or unwilling to deal effectively with the terrorist threat, economic problems that create social inequalities and divisions, and inadequate cooperation among regional countries.

However, some analysts differ in the severity of the transnational terrorist threat in SEA. On the one hand, Dana R. Dillon and Paolo Pasicolan (analysts at The Heritage Foundation) suggest that SEA will be "another important front" in the United States' global war against terrorism and the region is "both an ideal safe haven for him (Osama bin Laden) and a potential base of operations from which he could launch terrorist counteroffensives against the United States."³ On the other hand, John Gershman (senior analyst at the Interhemispheric Resource Center and the Asia/Pacific Editor for Foreign Policy in Focus) believes that the transnational terrorist threat in SEA is overestimated and that an overmilitarized response could be counterproductive. Based on a closer analysis of the terrorist groups and situation in SEA, Gershman's reasons for a lesser

threat in SEA include the absence of state-sponsored terrorism, the profound ethnic and religious diversities that prevent the establishment of a fundamentalist hegemony by any one group, the democratic nature of the major Southeast Asian countries, and the lack of popular support for the major extremist groups in the region.⁴

As international and regional anti-terrorism efforts begin to converge on SEA, an in-depth understanding of the conditions and causes that promote the threat of transnational terrorism in SEA is critical to ensure that these efforts are appropriate and effective. While the various analysts touch on these conditions and causes, there is generally insufficient depth and breadth in their analyses. As such, this thesis seeks to provide a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the emergence of transnational terrorism in SEA, which will provide a useful basis for the development of strategies to combat it.

Scope

The scope of this thesis is focused on the conditions and causes in SEA that provide fertile grounds for the emergence of transnational terrorism. It analyzes the impact of historical, political, economic, sociocultural, religious-ethnic, and geostrategic factors influencing SEA's security environment on the development of transnational terrorism. In particular, the thesis focuses on transnational terrorism developing as a strategy among major Islamic fundamentalist groups operating within the six core members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)--Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Brunei (figure 1)--where there are significantly large Muslim populations and substantive support for these fundamentalist groups. While

other extremist groups with non-Islamic agendas also exist within SEA, such as the communist New People's Army in the Philippines, the Islamic fundamentalist groups have presently exhibited the closest transnational linkages with the organizational ability to carry out attacks on a transnational scale that can present a significant threat to the region as a whole.



Figure 1. Map of Southeast Asia. *Source: CIA World Factbook* [map on-line]; available from http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/reference_maps/southeast_asia.html; Internet; accessed on 20 March 2003.

The four widely recognized major Islamic fundamentalist groups selected for the purpose of this thesis are: the JI, the Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia (KMM) in Malaysia, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Philippines, and the Laskar Jihad (LJ) in Indonesia. These groups are not all, but they are sufficiently representative of the emerging transnational terrorist threat in SEA. The thesis analyzes the history, goals, strategies, operations, and transnational relationships of these fundamentalist groups with reference to the underlying conditions in SEA that encourage the adoption of transnational terrorism by these groups.

Research Questions

The thesis answers the primary research question of why transnational terrorism is emerging in SEA. The two secondary research questions addressed by the thesis are: what is the nature of the emerging threat of transnational terrorism, particularly in connection with Islamic fundamentalism in SEA, and what are the underlying conditions and causes in SEA that lead to the development of transnational terrorism. The two tertiary research questions addressed by the thesis are: what is the impact of historical, political, economic, sociocultural, religious-ethnic, and geostrategic factors influencing SEA's security environment on the development of transnational terrorism, and what are the history, goals, strategies, operations, and transnational relationship of the four Islamic fundamentalist groups with reference to the above factors in SEA.

Assumptions

The thesis makes three key assumptions: the selected Islamic fundamentalist groups are sufficiently representative of the emerging transnational terrorist threat in SEA, overt sources about the Islamic fundamentalist groups provide sufficiently indicative data for the required analysis, and significant linkages exist between the emergence of transnational terrorism among the Islamic fundamentalist groups and the underlying factors influencing SEA's security environment.

Definitions

To facilitate clear understanding, it is important to define the term transnational terrorism as used in the thesis. The thesis does not intend to participate in the ongoing debate about the correct definition of terrorism. It suffices that a sufficiently broad and generally accepted definition be used. Bruce Hoffman's (author of *Inside Terrorism*) definition of terrorism, which combines the key elements of 109 different definitions of terrorism from different countries and agencies, is used in the thesis; that is, the "deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change."⁵ The thesis also does not intend to enter into the debate about the difference between terrorism and insurgency. It sees terrorism as a method and does not prejudge the legitimacy of the causes in the employment of terrorist tactics. Thus, a recognized insurgent group with a legitimate cause will be considered to be engaging in terrorism if the group uses terrorist tactics as an instrument to achieve its objectives. Transnational is defined as "extending or going beyond national boundaries."⁶ As such, transnational terrorism is defined in the thesis as terrorism involving activities,

organizations, targets, victims, and institutions of more than one country. Further, to differentiate transnational terrorism from international terrorism, the former involves primarily non-state actors while the latter involves direction and sponsorship by state actors.⁷

Limitations

The thesis is limited to an analysis of general trends and conditions in SEA that have an impact on the emergence of transnational terrorism in the region. It focuses on regional-level conditions rather than country-specific factors. As such, it does not seek to examine in detail the conditions within each SEA country that may contribute to the transnational terrorist threat. The thesis is also limited to a strategic and operational level analysis of the four Islamic fundamentalist groups, with emphasis on understanding the causes of the four groups' shift toward the adoption of transnational terrorism. It does not seek to study the four groups' organizations, operations, and tactics in detail. Thus, the widely available materials about these four groups and their publicly announced goals and strategies would be sufficient for the purpose of this thesis. The final limitation is that the thesis does not seek to address the strategies to combat transnational terrorism, though it aims to derive a framework from the nature, conditions, and causes of the emerging transnational terrorism that will be useful for the development of appropriate and comprehensive strategies to deal with it.

Anticipated Problems

The thesis anticipated in its research the problem of insufficiency of research materials at the Combined Arms Research Library or in the United States on the fundamentalist groups and situation in SEA. As such, a significant amount of the research relied on what was available on the Internet, especially articles and information generated from SEA. Relevant research materials were also sought from academic and research institutes based in SEA.

Conclusion

Finally, by elucidating the underlying conditions and causes of the emerging transnational terrorism in SEA, the thesis hopes to make a contribution to the international and regional efforts to deal with the emerging transnational terrorist threat.

¹Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs, *The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism* (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs, January 2003), 11-14.

²“Indonesia ponders Al Qaeda link,” *CNN.com*, 13 October 2002 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/10/13/bali.blast.chew/index.html>; Internet; accessed on 6 March 2003.

³Dana R. Dillon and Paolo Pasicolan, “Southeast Asia and the War against Terrorism,” *The Heritage Foundation Background*, no. 1496 (23 October 2001): 1.

⁴John Gershman, “Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (July/August 2002): 61-62.

⁵Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 43.

⁶*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., s.v. “transnational”, May 1993.

⁷Louise Richardson, “Terrorists as Transnational Actors” in *The Future of Terrorism*, ed. Max Taylor and John Horgan (London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 2001), 210.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the recent emergence and attention on the threat of transnational terrorism in SEA, there is limited authoritative and substantive literature on this field of study. The established literature focuses mainly on localized terrorist threats, rather than transnational terrorism, in SEA. As such, there is a gap in addressing the nature, conditions, and causes of the transnational terrorist threat in SEA as a region. Nevertheless, the possibility of SEA as a second front in the global war against terrorism prompted a proliferation of commentaries and analyses that provided useful research materials for this thesis.

Emergence of Transnational Terrorism in SEA

Beginning with the contributing factors to SEA's emergence as a second front in transnational terrorism, Heritage Foundation analysts Dana R. Dillon and Paolo Pasicolan put forward the following: SEA's large Muslim population base, a large number of established Islamic fundamentalist groups sympathetic to Al Qaeda, weak and corrupt governments that are unable or unwilling to deal effectively with the terrorist threat even though they oppose it, and inadequate cooperation among regional countries. Though the vast majority of Muslims are moderates and do not support terrorism, they provide "fertile ground for Al Qaeda to recruit fighters, raise money, and find safe harbor." The result is a region that is both "an ideal safe haven . . . and a potential base of operations" for Al Qaeda.¹ While the majority of Islamic fundamentalist groups in SEA have

domestic agendas and limited resources to expand their fight outside their home countries, the availability and influence of foreign support can lead to the rise of transnational terrorist agendas, objectives, and activities in SEA. As such, Dillon and Pasicolan urge the United States to help regional governments to identify domestic Islamic fundamentalist organizations with foreign support and to cooperate with them to cut off that support, among other proposed initiatives.²

Interhemispheric Resource Center senior analyst John Gershman advocates similar underlying conditions that facilitate the emergence of transnational terrorism in SEA. In addition, he identifies the economic problems and fragile democratic institutions of many countries in SEA that lead to the “economic marginalization and political subordination of large segments of their populations.”³ However, Gershman goes deeper in his analysis of these underlying conditions to show that the transnational terrorist threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism may be overstated.

First, there is “a profound ethnic and religious diversity (including in the practice of Islam) that characterizes the area that militates against the establishment of a fundamentalist hegemony by any one group.” Islamic fundamentalist groups fall into distinctly different categories, namely, “movements that focus on cultural and spiritual renewal, political parties, armed and unarmed organizations fighting for autonomy or secession for Muslim areas, radical Islamist paramilitary groups, and transnational terrorist cells and networks.” The largest and most influential groups are in fact political parties or revivalist organizations with broad-based moderate Muslim support and opposed to terrorism such as the Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia.⁴

This leads to the second point that the Islamic fundamentalist groups engaged in transnational terrorism actually do not have broad-based popular support or lack serious transnational agendas. For example, the only “groups in the region that have demonstrated a capacity for large-scale attacks--the JI and the KMM--are made up of the well-educated middle classes. . . . Both the JI and KMM have small memberships and only limited ties to more broad-based Islamist groups.”⁵ The JI “advocates the creation through force of an Islamic state from southern Thailand through the lower part of the Philippines.” Other prominent militant organizations such as “several organizations operating in southern Thailand, the Moro National Liberation Front and Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines, and the Free Aceh Movement in Indonesia” are in effect community-level organizations with genuine domestic political agendas relating more to demands for secession or autonomy than the creation of an Islamic regime throughout SEA. Another category of militant Islamic organizations is the “radical Islamist paramilitary that blur the edges between criminal gangs and militias” such as the Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines and the LJ in Indonesia. These groups mix politics with criminal activities such as extortion and racketeering.⁶

Thirdly, all the major SEA countries are generally democratic and opposed to terrorism, thereby making violent Islamic fundamentalism less attractive. In summary, Gershman sees the terrorist groups in SEA as possessing primarily localized political objectives while those with transnational objectives lack popular support. As such, he urges United States policy makers to focus efforts away from a militarized response, which may be counterproductive, to a broader response to improve the economic

conditions of the SEA countries and strengthen their weak and fragile democratic institutions and regional and intergovernmental organizations.

The Director of Singapore's Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, Barry Desker, reaches similar conclusions as Gershman. On conditions within SEA, he also notes that SEA is "a region notorious for its porous borders, large populations of urban and rural poor, and both Muslim and non-Muslim armed extremist groups." SEA also has 20 percent of the world's one billion Muslims, Indonesia hosting the world's largest Muslim population of 170 million. Desker advocates that the war on terrorism must be focused at the political, economic, and ideological levels to win the hearts and minds of the global Islamic community, instead of a predominantly military approach. Such a comprehensive approach is essential to redress the widening West-Islam divide.⁷

Underlying Conditions in SEA

Political scientist Robert C. Bone's study of contemporary SEA in 1962 provided some insights into the underlying historical, political, social, and cultural conditions in SEA that could remain relevant and impact the emergence of transnational terrorism. Bone described contemporary SEA as "an exciting cultural complexity, a political fiction, and an international problem of uncertain but disturbing proportions."⁸ The term "Southeast Asia" came into general use during World War II only as a matter of geopolitical convenience for military strategists, thus betraying the inherent complexities and diversities within the region.

Historically, SEA's favorable geopolitical position at the crossroads between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, coupled with abundant agricultural resources, had constantly

attracted the attention of outside interests. The waves of Malay, Indian, Chinese, and more recently European immigration into SEA throughout hundreds of years had resulted in a patchwork of racial, religious, and ethnic diversities that were deeply ingrained in the social and cultural fabric of SEA. These diversities were accentuated by European colonization, which introduced artificial boundaries and external models of state organizations into SEA, rather than allowing them to develop indigenously. While the newly independent countries in SEA struggled with their new identities and roles with the end of the colonial era after World War II, new pressures and influences arose. SEA had barely begun to assimilate the impact of European colonialism when it was faced with accelerating change after World War II and entered into the Cold War between two superpowers.

The result of all these external shocks into SEA was the incomplete political, social, and cultural integration within the individual countries of SEA and within SEA as a region. Such incomplete integration within artificially defined societies created major problems such as competing institutions and ideologies, uneven sociocultural and economic development, and the troubles of minorities and regionalism. The deeply rooted and severe faultlines within SEA made it an inherently unstable and vulnerable region that could be torn apart by either internal or external forces.

Airpower Research Institute's Professor of Asian Studies, Dr Lawrence E. Grinter, contributed a further insight into the underlying conditions in SEA in his article on "Realities of Revolutionary Violence in SEA in 1990." He argued that the diversities and divisions within SEA have alienated numerous minorities and other groups from the mainstream political, economic, and social life, and led to a history of political violence

been used as a means of rectifying grievances.⁹ Having analyzed the different revolutionary experiences of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Cambodia, Grinter concluded that the origins of revolutionary violence in these countries are fundamentally internal. He believed that the roots of political violence in most SEA countries spring from internal socio-economic problems and dilemmas, and are limited in transcending national boundaries. Thus, he urged policy makers to address the specific underlying causes and dynamics of the political violence.¹⁰

RAND analyst Angel M. Rabasa provides a more recent analysis of the security situation in SEA after the 11 September attacks on the United States. SEA continues to be an area of geostrategic importance as it is the “crossroads between the concentration of industrial, technological, and military power in Northeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East.”¹¹ The straits and sea lanes of communications in SEA are critical to seaborne trade, especially oil imports, and military movement between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. After the Cold War, SEA turned its attention toward managing the emergence of an increasingly powerful China, which is becoming more assertive, especially in its competing claims over the South China Sea with several SEA countries. Internally, SEA continues to be plagued by outstanding territorial disputes and tensions among its member countries--problems left over from the colonial era.

Another emerging threat is that of international terrorist and radical networks associated with radical Islamic ideologies. This is particularly significant as SEA has the largest concentration of Muslims in the world, with more than 200 million Muslims in Indonesia, Muslim majorities in Malaysia and Brunei, and significant Muslim minorities in Singapore, southern Thailand, and southern Philippines. Though the radical Islamic

groups represent a small minority of Muslims in SEA, they have the potential to radicalize the mainstream Muslim population and destabilize secular and moderate governments in the region.¹²

To deal with these major problems, ASEAN has been remarkably successful since its inception, notwithstanding the diversities inherent in SEA. ASEAN has also been relatively effective in promoting economic and limited security cooperation against transnational security threats. Shortly after the 11 September attacks on the U.S., ASEAN leaders adopted the 2001 ASEAN Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism at the Seventh ASEAN Summit in November 2001. They committed themselves to counter, prevent, and suppress all forms of terrorist acts, and to strengthen existing counterterrorism and transnational crime efforts.¹³ Nevertheless, Rabasa assesses that the 1997 economic crisis in SEA and subsequent political crisis in Indonesia have weakened ASEAN as a regional grouping and diluted its effectiveness in dealing with transnational terrorism. In addition, the resultant deterioration of economic, social, and political conditions has produced an environment favorable to the activities of terrorists, radical groups, and separatists.

As such, Rabasa sees today's SEA as a region of continued geostrategic importance and potential, but weakened politically, economically, and socially both as a regional grouping and as individual countries by the 1997 economic crisis. This has hindered SEA from dealing effectively with the major problems arising from its historical and inherent faultlines. Rabasa therefore urges the United States to support and strengthen the political, economic, and security structures in the region so that SEA can

regain its strength, stability, and cohesion to act individually and together to counter the emerging transnational terrorist threat.¹⁴

Four Islamic Fundamentalist Groups

Having surveyed the historical and present conditions in SEA, the focus is now turned toward the four selected Islamic fundamentalist groups. The JI and KMM are at present the only groups with a transnational agenda that advocate the creation of an Islamic regime throughout Muslim-dominated parts of SEA. The JI is a clandestine network spanning at least five countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore) in SEA, while the KMM is based in Malaysia. JI traces its historical roots back to Darul Islam (DI) in the 1940s, an Indonesian organization that fought against Dutch colonial rule. After Indonesia gained its independence in 1949, DI continued its armed struggle to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia. In 1985, DI elements fled to Malaysia to escape suppression by the Indonesian government and renamed themselves JI. JI's former leader, Abdullah Sungkar, established close ties with Al Qaeda when he participated in the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s. Since the 1990s, JI has been sending selected recruits to train in Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. JI's goal, strategy, and operation have developed under Al Qaeda's influence, and it shares the anti-west ideology of global jihad propagated by Al Qaeda. JI operates Al Qaeda-type networks and cells, and receives advice and instructions on its operational plans from Al Qaeda. For example, JI's plans to attack targets in Singapore received approval from Mohd Atef, one of Osama bin Laden's trusted aides. Al Qaeda has also used JI's leader Riduan Isamuddin (better known as Hambali), as the linkman for the region.¹⁵

KMM is a much younger group established in 1995 by Zainon Ismail, a former mujahidin in Afghanistan (that is, someone who has fought in the Soviet-Afghan War). KMM began with the aim to transform Malaysia into an Islamic state through violent means.¹⁶ However, KMM's connection with JI has expanded its goal to a transnational level. Malaysian police have assessed the KMM to have seventy to eighty members operating in networks throughout Malaysia.¹⁷ Both the JI and KMM allegedly share the same leaders from Indonesia, Abu Bakar Bashir and Hambali. Both JI and KMM members tend to be middle-class professionals and do not appear to have the broad-based popular support for their bold vision. They operate like transnational criminal corporations and make up for their shortcomings by using modern communication technologies to plan and coordinate their actions.¹⁸

To sustain their formidable vision and conduct operations throughout SEA, the JI and KMM collaborate extensively with other radical Islamic groups both within and outside the region. Their linkages with other Islamic fundamentalist groups in the region began to surface in recent years. Evidence from recently detained JI members show that dozens of them have trained in MILF camps in Mindanao in the 1990s. In 1997, MILF allowed JI to set up its own training facility in Camp Abu Bakar, known as Camp Hudaybiyya. Fathur Rohman Al-Ghozi, a key Indonesian JI member, has also served as a demolitions expert and explosives trainer with MILF.¹⁹ The KMM has also been linked to the Laskar Jihad in Indonesia and the Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines. Outside the region, FBI chief Robert Mueller has singled out JI as Al Qaeda's foremost Southeast Asian collaborator. Both JI and KMM also have members trained in Afghanistan, received over

\$140,000 from Al Qaeda over three years, and established Al Qaeda-type cells throughout SEA.²⁰

The emerging evidence has shown that the JI is at the core of an extensive and complex terrorist network in SEA. Through its visionary and shared fundamentalist Islamic goal, and supported by foreign Islamic fundamentalist organizations, it is able to overcome national and geographical barriers and bring together several Islamic fundamentalist groups into deep ties and mutual cooperation. In 1999, JI formed a regional alliance of jihad or mujahidin groups called the Rabitatul Mujahidin in the hope that the groups could cooperate and share resources for training, procurement of arms, financial assistance, and terrorist operations.²¹ JI's modus operandi in SEA bears the influencing marks of Al Qaeda, with the conduct of transnational terrorism used as a means to achieve its vision. Though the JI and KMM may be small groups without broad-based popular support, their daring vision, extensive linkages with regional and extra-regional radical groups, and strong support and influence by Al Qaeda will continue to present a formidable transnational terrorist threat and potentially radicalize and destabilize an inherently divided region.

The MILF was formed in 1977 with the aim of establishing an independent Islamic state in the southern Philippines²²--a predominantly Muslim region with the "worst poverty, income inequality, infant and maternal mortality rates, and literacy levels."²³ The Philippine government's failure in addressing the grinding poverty, political subordination, and anti-Muslim discrimination in the southern Philippines has contributed to the MILF's cause. With 15,000 members, it is currently the largest Islamic separatist group in the Philippines today. To achieve its aim, the MILF has mounted a

series of terrorist attacks against civilian and military targets in southern Philippines. The MILF has also unsuccessfully attempted peace negotiations with the Filipino government from 1997 to 1999.²⁴ In August 2001, the MILF negotiated a ceasefire agreement with the government and negotiations are ongoing, despite violations by both sides.²⁵ Unlike the clandestine JI and KMM, the MILF is a “community-level organization, enjoys mass membership bases, has genuine political agendas, and (with exceptions) generally limits their violence to military targets.”²⁶

The MILF has denied charges that it is linked to Al Qaeda or supports a global terrorism agenda. It is cooperating with the Philippine government and reaffirming its commitment to peace talks so as to evade the corrosive “terrorist” label and any subsequent crackdown measures by global counter-terrorism forces.²⁷ However, the emerging evidence appears to prove otherwise. Al Qaeda has reportedly used the Philippines as one of its operational hubs through the MILF. The Al Qaeda-MILF relationship can be traced back to the Soviet-Afghan war when Osama bin Laden sent his brother-in-law, Mohammad Jamal Khalifa, to the Philippines in 1988 to recruit Filipino Muslim fighters. The MILF, under the leadership of Hashim Salamat, was reported to have sent a thousand fighters to Afghanistan as it saw the training of the fighters as vital to the strengthening of the MILF. Since 1991, Khalifa has begun to establish a permanent Al Qaeda network in the Philippines. Through a charitable front organization, the Islamic International Relief Organization, Khalifa was able to channel money to provide financial support to the MILF.²⁸

While the MILF appears to be no more than a domestic separatist movement, emerging evidence of its connections with Al Qaeda and other Islamic fundamentalist

groups in SEA have caught regional and international attention. Though not professing to possess a transnational agenda, its participation in transnational terrorist activities reflects a dangerous trend that is emerging in SEA.

LJ was founded in 2000 with the goal of establishing an Islamic state in the Moluccas and Sulawesi in Indonesia. It is known for its unrelenting attacks on Christian populations on the islands of the Moluccas and Sulawesi. The members adhere to the stricter Wahhabi creed of Islam espoused by Al Qaeda and see Christians as belligerent infidels, thereby giving them the religious basis to kill. The deep animosity between the two religions on the Moluccas and Sulawesi, the relative failure of the Indonesian government in meeting the basic needs of the people, and the alleged covert support from Indonesian military hardliners hoping to destabilize the post-Suharto government of former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid contribute to LJ's 10,000 strong membership and its rise as the largest and most organized militant Muslim organization in Indonesia.²⁹

Similar to MILF, LJ's leaders have denied linkages with Al Qaeda and even denounced Al Qaeda's ideology as not in line with true Islam. However, emerging evidence has again demonstrated otherwise. LJ's leader, Jafar Umar Thalib, has acknowledged connections with the KMM, a probable Al Qaeda collaborator. Indonesia's National Intelligence Agency also claims to have evidence of former Al Qaeda training camps in the Moluccas and that Al Qaeda fighters have been fighting on Sulawesi Island. LJ has also received money from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Afghanistan.³⁰ LJ's emerging connections with Al Qaeda and other Islamic

fundamentalist groups in SEA have corroborated the trend of transnational terrorism as an emerging means to achieve primarily domestic separatist aims.

Linkages with Al Qaeda

Terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna provides further insights into why Al Qaeda has chosen SEA as one of its new base of operations. He points out that SEA's democratic space, corrupt regimes, weak leaders, lax security environment, a support base of 240 million Muslims, and the potential for inter-religious conflict have provided fertile ground for existing, emerging, and foreign Islamist terrorist groups to advance their aims and objectives. He explained that though the Muslims in SEA are more tolerant and moderate than their Middle Eastern counterparts because they live in the shadow of large Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu communities, they are slowly being politicized and radicalized in their attitude toward non-Muslims and the West. This is due to religious conflicts in places such as the Moluccas and Mindanao, the general attitude of the West to the Muslim world, and large-scale proselytizing activity, some of which is spearheaded by Al Qaeda. As a result, at least 100 politically active Islamist parties and active terrorist groups have emerged in SEA, especially in Indonesia, since the middle of 1998.³¹ These developments have made transnational terrorism an increasingly serious threat in SEA.

Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs, in its White Paper on the JI threat, provides greater definition on the development of Al Qaeda's links with SEA, and the radicalization and transnationalization of Islamic fundamentalist groups in the region. It believed that the most significant factor was their involvement in the Soviet-Afghan war,

which gave the key figures of these groups firsthand experience of the glory of jihad and its eventual victory over the Soviet Union. Besides transferring their experiences and skills acquired in Afghanistan back to the region, these key figures also formed a loose and trusted brotherhood together with their Al Qaeda trainers to support each other if any need arose. Thus, through this brotherhood, which includes JI, MILF, and several other Islamic fundamentalist groups in SEA, Al Qaeda is able to enjoy secure, reliable, and easy access into the region.³²

Another aspect of the Al Qaeda link to SEA is the impact of the U.S. global war on terrorism on the security of the region and its efforts to combat transnational terrorism. U.S. antiterrorism efforts in SEA, such as the reinvigorated U.S.-Philippine military cooperation, have raised suspicions about the re-establishment of U.S. presence in the region.³³ More importantly, regional fundamentalist groups have perceived the US-led war on terrorism as an assault against Islam. The U.S. has become a single and easily agreed upon enemy as propagated by Al Qaeda and appeared to have replaced regional problems, such as the Moluccas, as the main object of their wrath.³⁴ Such a perception has also permeated to the larger moderate Muslim majorities in the region and required U.S. sensitivity when dealing with the region. The U.S. should be particularly sensitive to Indonesia and Malaysia's delicate internal situations. For example, although Indonesian President Megawati has expressed support for the international campaign against terrorism, she will continue to be vulnerable to domestic Islamic opposition and to other radical factions.³⁵

Historical Development of Religious-motivated Transnational Terrorism

Finally, terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman provides some useful background on the historical development of international terrorism, particularly Islam-related terrorism, which may help explain the development of transnational terrorism in SEA. Hoffman argued that modern international terrorism first occurred on 22 July 1968 when three armed terrorists from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) hijacked an Israeli commercial airline en route from Rome to Tel Aviv with the purpose of trading the passengers for Palestinian terrorists imprisoned in Israel.³⁶ What made this hijacking significantly different from previous ones was that it was meant as a bold political statement, carried out from another country, and targeted at an international audience. The intent was to shock and stimulate worldwide fear. PLO terrorists had come to appreciate that operations perpetrated in foreign countries and involving foreign nationals, including innocent civilians, were a reliable means of attracting attention to themselves and their cause. Technological advances, globalization, and the development of global media also facilitated international terrorism. The success of the PLO in publicizing the plight of the Palestinians through the “internationalization” of its struggle with Israel has since served as a model for the development of international terrorism.³⁷

The rise of Islam-related terrorism has its roots in the success of the Iranian revolution in 1979 that transformed Iran into an Islamic republic. Iran began to export its revolution worldwide and became one of the first countries to sponsor Islam-related terrorist activities. “The Iranian revolution is held up as an example to Muslims worldwide, exhorting them to reassert the fundamental teachings of the Quran and to resist the intrusion of Western, particularly the United States, influence into the Middle

East.”³⁸ The United States’ support for Israel and many local reactionary regimes is generally perceived as the cause of the region’s problems. Violence and coercion are not only permissible to achieve the worldwide spread of Islamic law, but a necessary means to this divinely sanctioned end. Many prominent Muslim clerics in the region also lent their support to the Iranian voice and helped to radicalize the beliefs and attitudes of a new generation of Muslims within and outside the Middle East. Thus, with the beginning of the Iranian revolution, religion has become a powerful transnational force in international relations, and religious terrorism has great potential for transcending national borders.³⁹

Hoffman also showed that religion-related terrorism tends to result in less discriminating and higher levels of casualties than secular terrorist organizations due to their radically different worldviews, value systems, mechanisms of legitimization and justification, and concepts of morality. For the religious terrorist, violence is a divine duty and therefore transcends moral, political, and practical constraints. Where secular terrorists seek largely to correct a flaw in the system, religious terrorists seek the creation of a new system. Religious terrorist groups also do not have a specific constituency from which they derive support, unlike secular terrorist groups. The combination of these three factors leads to a sanctioning of limitless violence on a virtually open-ended category of targets.⁴⁰

Conclusion

In conclusion, a current literature review provides useful insights into the underlying conditions in SEA that favor the emergence of transnational terrorism, the

goals, strategies, and operations of the four selected Islamic fundamentalist groups and their transnational linkages, the extent of Al Qaeda influence in the region, and the historical background and development of transnational, particularly Islam-related terrorism. The analysis of these interrelated factors would uncover the underlying conditions, causes, and nature of transnational terrorism in SEA and explain why it is emerging in the region.

¹Dana R. Dillon and Paolo Pasicolan, "Southeast Asia and the War against Terrorism," *The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder*, no. 1496 (23 October 2001): 1.

²*Ibid.*, 2.

³John Gershman, "Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?" *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (July/August 2002): 61.

⁴*Ibid.*, 62-64.

⁵*Ibid.*, 62.

⁶*Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁷Barry Desker and Kumar Ramakrishna, "Forging an Indirect Strategy in Southeast Asia," *The Washington Quarterly* (Spring 2002): 162.

⁸Robert C. Bone, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (New York: Random House, 1962), 3.

⁹Lawrence E. Grinter, *Realities of Revolutionary Violence in Southeast Asia* (Alabama, Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, March 1990), 1.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹Angel M. Rabasa, "Southeast Asia After 9/11: Regional Trends and U.S. Interests," *RAND Corporation*, December 2001, 1.

¹²*Ibid.*, 4.

¹³Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, "Terrorism: Southeast Asia's Response," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 4 January 2002, 1.

¹⁴Rabasa, 10.

¹⁵Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs, *The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism* (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs, January 2003), 6-9.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷“Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM).” *Federation of American Scientists* [article on-line]; available from <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/kmm.htm>; Internet; accessed on 6 March 2003.

¹⁸Gershman, 68.

¹⁹Home Affairs, 8.

²⁰Reyko Huang, “In the Spotlight: Jemaah Islamiah,” *Center for Defense Information*, 18 October 2002, 1.

²¹Home Affairs, 7.

²²Reyko Huang, “In the Spotlight: Moro Islamic Liberation Front,” *Center for Defense Information*, 15 February 2002, 2.

²³Gershman, 69.

²⁴Francisco L Tolin, “The Response of the Philippine Government and the Role of the AFP to address Terrorism,” *National Defense College of the Philippines* [article on-line]; available from <http://www.ndcp.edu.ph/tokyopaper.htm>; Internet; accessed on 29 January 2003, 2.

²⁵John Gershman, “U.S. Takes Antiterrorism War to the Philippines,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, Global Affairs Commentary, 15 January 2002.

²⁶Gershman, “Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?” 67.

²⁷Huang, “In the Spotlight: Moro Islamic Liberation Front,” 1.

²⁸Rommel C. Banlaoi, “The Role of Philippine-American Relations in the Global Campaign Against Terrorism: Implications for Regional Security,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 24, no. 2 (August 2002): 298-299.

²⁹Reyko Huang, “In the Spotlight: Laskar Jihad,” *Center for Defense Information*, 8 March 2002, 1-2.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 1.

³¹“Gravity of Terrorism Shifting to Region,” *Singapore Straits Times*, 15 October 2002.

³²Home Affairs, 4-5.

³³Banlaoi, 1.

³⁴ICG Asia, “Indonesia Backgrounder: How the Jemaah Islamiyah Terrorist Network Operates,” *ICG Asia Report No. 43* (11 December 2002): 2.

³⁵Kurt M. Campbell and Michele A. Fluornoy, *To Prevail: An American Strategy for the Campaign Against Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2001), 275.

³⁶Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 67.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 68.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 96.

³⁹Louise Richardson, “Terrorists as Transnational Actors” in *The Future of Terrorism*, ed. Max Taylor and John Horgan (London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 2001), 215.

⁴⁰Hoffman, 94-95.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There is currently limited authoritative work that addresses this area of research. There is also little primary evidence because of the recent phenomenon of transnational terrorism in SEA, except for sporadic revelations from governmental and intelligence agencies inside and outside of SEA. Consequently, this thesis addresses the underlying conditions and causes of transnational terrorism in SEA rather than the specifics of transnational terrorist activities in SEA. The research focused on both the historical conditions and current developments within SEA and the selected Islamic fundamentalist groups that contribute to the emergence of transnational terrorism in SEA. The research methodology was primarily based on a qualitative and inductive analysis of the research materials. Specifically, the research process sought answers to different but related components of the thesis, and to draw the appropriate linkages from the different answers, and deduce the relevant conclusions and recommendations for the thesis. The research process was done at three levels.

Tertiary Level

It began with a data-gathering tertiary level that sought to obtain information about the historical and current conditions and developments in SEA and the four selected groups known to be involved in transnational terrorism. It also gathered initial perspectives on why SEA provides fertile grounds for the development of transnational terrorism. Specifically, it focused on a comprehensive range of historical, political,

economic, sociocultural, religious-ethnic, and geostrategic factors within SEA that provides a balanced perspective on the underlying conditions that may contribute to the emergence of transnational terrorism in the region. In addition, to provide an objective and balanced analysis, the research also considered aspects of the six factors that may impair the development of transnational terrorism in SEA.

On the four groups, the research selected a diverse range of Islamic fundamentalist groups from different SEA countries so as to provide a better representation of Islamic fundamentalism and transnational terrorist relationships and activities in the region. The four groups are different in their history, goals, strategies, size, and modes and areas of operations. Another criterion of selection was the widely acknowledged involvement in transnational terrorism by the four groups and the existence of transnational linkages among these four groups and with Al Qaeda.

Research on the four groups was focused at the strategic and operational levels rather than the tactical level. Specifically, it studied their history, goals, strategies, operations, and transnational relationship, with emphasis on identifying the causes leading to the groups' adopting transnational terrorism as part of their strategies and operations. It sought to identify both positive and negative causes for the emergence of transnational terrorism in SEA. The answers to the tertiary level questions provide the building blocks for further analysis to address the secondary level questions.

Secondary Level

The secondary level draws linkages from the tertiary level research materials to derive the nature of the transnational threat and its emergence in SEA. By studying the

unique conditions and causes in SEA and their linkages with the development of the four selected groups, the secondary level analyzes and derives systemic conditions and causes leading to the emergence of transnational terrorism in SEA.

The analysis was done at two sub-levels. The first sub-level involved the separate analyses of SEA and the four groups so as to derive the underlying conditions and causes in the region leading to transnational terrorism. The analysis of the six factors within SEA highlighted regional-level trends, identified contributing and countervailing factors, and summarized the complex conditions within the region. The comparative analysis of the four groups sought an in-depth understanding of the underlying causes pushing the groups toward transnational terrorist action. The second sub-level involved a joint analysis of the conditions in SEA and the causes of the four groups to derive a clear and proper understanding of the nature of the emerging threat of transnational terrorism in SEA. The answers to the secondary level questions provide the clues and directions to address the primary thesis question in a structured and systematic manner.

Primary Level

The primary level draws the relevant conclusions from the secondary level analysis in a systematic framework to explain why transnational terrorism is emerging in SEA. It consolidates the analysis and facilitates the understanding of the nature, conditions, and causes of transnational terrorism in SEA. The answer to the primary level question will provide useful insights and a systematic framework for the development of strategies to deal with the threat of transnational terrorism in SEA.

Research Materials

The research materials used for the thesis were based on four categories of literature of varying type, source, and authority. First, research materials on SEA's history, development, and future challenges are based on longstanding and authoritative works. They help to derive the conditions in SEA relevant to the emergence of transnational terrorism. Second, research materials on terrorism in general and international and transnational terrorism in particular were also based on longstanding and authoritative works. They help to provide insights into the general conditions and causes for the emergence of transnational terrorism. Third, as there are limited authoritative works on the selected groups with respect to the emerging transnational terrorism, the research materials are based mainly on recent research papers and newspaper articles. To address their reduced authority, extra care was exercised to ensure that the research papers and newspaper articles were carefully selected from reliable research centers and compared with one another for consistency. They help to provide an understanding of these groups, especially the causes for their adoption of transnational terrorism. Fourth, with limited authoritative works on transnational terrorism in SEA, the research materials in this area were also based on recent research papers and newspaper articles. They help to provide insights and directions for the development of the thesis.

To provide a balanced perspective to the thesis, the research materials used for this thesis came primarily from SEA, American, and Australian sources because of their interests in the region. The American global war on terrorism has led to a proliferation of research materials in international and transnational terrorism. Though the American focus is primarily on the Middle East, some attention has been placed on SEA due to the

uncovering of extensive linkages between Al Qaeda and extremist groups in SEA. The Australian focus in transnational terrorism in SEA has become more prominent after the terrorist bombings in Bali.

Finally, given the current nature of the issue, this thesis addresses only the underlying conditions and causes in SEA that contribute to transnational terrorism. It did not seek to address all the new evidence on transnational terrorism in SEA that were uncovered in the process of the development of the thesis, except for those that were quintessential and pertinent to answering the primary thesis question. This approach ensures that amid the emerging evidence, the thesis remains relevant and useful for understanding why transnational terrorism is emerging in SEA.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

A survey of the conditions in SEA revealed that there were both contributing and countervailing factors to the emergence of transnational terrorism in the region. The situation in SEA is more complex than what have been frequently portrayed. While there are inherent vulnerabilities in SEA, other contributing factors to transnational terrorism, namely developmental difficulties and external influence, are conditions that are temporal and non-lasting in nature. Similarly, a comparative analysis of the four selected Islamic fundamentalist groups also revealed both pull and push factors for them to engage in transnational terrorism. While transnational terrorism has become more attractive as a means for the four Islamic fundamentalist groups to gain external support and achieve their individual goals, the linkages among them are actually tenuous and weak.

The two analyses, when taken together, demonstrate that the nature of transnational terrorism in SEA has strong external influence but weak internal coherence, and that the underlying conditions and causes are intimately linked, complex, and double-edged in their influence on transnational terrorism in the region. Thus, though the current situation in SEA, where transnational terrorist activities have begun to plague the region, suggests that the contributing factors have overshadowed the countervailing factors, the region is not destined as the second front of transnational terrorism. Rather, with a clear understanding of the complex and multi-faceted nature, conditions, and causes of transnational terrorism in SEA, a balanced and comprehensive strategy can be developed to deal with it.

Conditions in SEA

The conditions in SEA that contribute to the emergence of transnational terrorism are examined using six factors, namely, history, politics, economics, sociocultural, religious-ethnic, and geostrategic factors. Table 1 provides a summary of the analysis of the conditions in SEA.

Table 1. Analysis of Conditions in SEA

Influencing Factors	Contributing Conditions	Countervailing Conditions
History	History of divisions and violence.	Primarily nation-based violence.
Politics	Developing political institutions; Domestic political problems.	Declared commitment to combat terrorism.
Economics	Recent economic crisis; Economic inequalities.	Underlying economic potential for recovery.
Sociocultural	Immigrant societies; Incomplete integration.	Multi-cultural perspectives; Mutual understanding and tolerance.
Religious-Ethnic	Rise of extremist Islam; External influence; Large Muslim population.	Largely moderate Islam; Different Islamic sects.
Geostrategic	Prone to external influences; Porous region; Developing regional institutions.	Willingness to cooperate; Potential for regional resilience

Historical Factor

First, SEA has a history of organized groups using violence to achieve various political goals. Such violence might be revolutionary, separatist, and religious-ethnic in nature. SEA countries were all too familiar with revolutionary violence against their colonial rulers, especially after the Second World War.¹ For example, Indonesia engaged in many years of armed struggle against its Dutch colonists before gaining its

independence. Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines had similar, though less violent, experiences with the British and Americans respectively.

Separatist and religious-ethnic violence often succeeded revolutionary violence in a number of SEA countries due to the adverse impact of colonization, which introduced artificial borders and national identities on divergent religious-ethnic groups. Unable to integrate these different groups into the national life, many SEA countries faced violence from these groups demanding autonomy, independence, or the radical imposition of their religious laws. For example, Indonesia is currently battling armed separatist forces in the provinces of Aceh, Moluccas, and Sulawesi while the Philippines is faced with the same situation in the province of Mindanao. In Indonesia, there are a number of Islamic fundamentalist groups advocating the introduction of Islamic laws in the country and some of the violent ones are also engaging in religious-ethnic violence against the Christian minority.

Thus, while the degree and nature of violence varies in different SEA nations, the character and utility of political violence has been imprinted on the region. The violent roots of SEA history thereby provide favorable conditions for fundamentalist groups to adopt terrorism, even at the transnational level, as they gravitate toward extreme actions in their ongoing, but unsuccessful political struggles.

However, SEA's experience with political violence has been largely national in character.² There has been little transnational cooperation historically in the pursuit of various revolutionary, separatist, or religious-ethnic aims in the different SEA countries. Thus, the emergence of transnational terrorism is not a natural outcome of SEA's

historical conditions; rather, external influences played a significant role in transforming the character of SEA's historically violent roots.

Political Factor

Second, many SEA countries are still struggling with their developing political and economic structures and institutions. SEA countries (except Thailand) gained their independence only within the last fifty years. The political systems and cultures in several SEA countries have not matured fully into stable and robust political entities. Many SEA countries are still struggling with the consequences of colonization such as separatism, and sociocultural and religious-ethnic conflicts. In addition, SEA countries' political development after their independence was complicated by the bipolar environment created as a result of the Cold War. To make matters worse, SEA became one of the battlefields for the proxy war between the US and Soviet Union, which served to warp the political process in some SEA countries. As a result, political institutions are not fully embraced and domestic political problems tend to place constraints on several SEA countries' ability to deal effectively with the threat of transnational terrorism. Indonesia provides an excellent example.

Indonesia had been ruled under former President Suharto's dictatorial control since the early days of its independence, thereby curtailing political development in Indonesia for more than thirty years. Indonesia only recently democratized its political process after Suharto's downfall in 1998. The number of political parties has increased significantly, especially those with an Islamic constituency, which is representative of Indonesia's predominantly Muslim population. The existing secular government is

formed by a delicate coalition representing a multiplicity of interests, with increasing influence from Islamic-based parties. The Indonesian government is still in a transitory stage and beginning to function effectively and efficiently with multi-party and coalition politics. Therefore, with respect to terrorism, the ruling government faces constraints in its ability to adopt tough policies against Islamic fundamentalist groups to avoid alienating the domestic Islamic constituency.³

While the difficulties posed by the problems of ongoing political development in some SEA countries provide favorable conditions for the conduct of transnational terrorist activities, the political climate in SEA is not entirely ineffectual and hopeless. Notwithstanding their respective domestic difficulties, all SEA governments have declared their commitment to combat transnational terrorism.⁴ While the extent of their efforts may vary, the anti-terrorist posture by all SEA countries can serve as a dampening factor on the emergence of transnational terrorism in SEA.

Economic Factor

Third, SEA has been struggling with poor economic conditions since the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Many SEA countries have plummeted from near double digit to negative or near zero GDP growth rates.⁵ The crisis has also accentuated the economic inequalities within many SEA countries, which fuels the dissatisfaction and discontent among the poor and alienated segments of the population. Without adequate attention and economic improvement, this growing segment of the population is highly susceptible to provide the support and recruiting base for extremist activities, including terrorism, in pursuit of goals that promise to redress their economic plight. Transnational terrorism

also becomes increasingly attractive because of the additional financial resources made available from linkages with other terrorist groups. The situation in the southern Philippines provides a good example.

Despite the Filipino government's efforts to develop the predominantly Muslim southern Philippines, the region remains the poorest and least developed in the country.⁶ Though the government has granted autonomy to parts of the region in an effort to address the problems, it has not significantly improved the situation due to ineffectiveness and mismanagement on the part of the local officials. In addition, the economic crisis worsens the situation.⁷ As such, the Muslims in the southern Philippines continue to support the violent activities of various Islamic fundamentalist groups operating in the region, such as the Moro National Liberation Front, the MILF, and the Abu Sayyaf Group. Recruitment from this desperate and disgruntled population base also becomes easier with the immediate financial incentives provided by the fundamentalist groups. In fact, adequate financial resources become an important element of these fundamentalist groups to sustain their support and recruiting bases, thereby increasing the attractiveness of criminal and transnational terrorism.

Thus, the present economic conditions in SEA create divisions and vulnerabilities within SEA countries that can be exploited for transnational terrorist activities. Besides the Philippines, similar economic inadequacies and inequalities can also be found in parts of Indonesia and southern Thailand. However, SEA's economic malaise is not a permanent condition. Before the economic crisis, the Asia-Pacific region had been described as the economic powerhouse of the world. Notwithstanding the possibility of

future economic downturns, the underlying economic potential within SEA is likely to remain strong and capable of overcoming the temporary disruption.

Sociocultural Factor

Fourth, the sociocultural circumstances in SEA tend to have a divisive effect within individual SEA countries and the region as a whole. History and geography have made SEA a region of great diversity in the makeup of its society and culture. SEA has historically served as the crossroads of great civilizations, such as China, India, and the Middle East, because of its geographical location. Movement of ideas, people, and goods among these civilizations used SEA as the convenient transit point, which was further encouraged during the colonial period. The great influx of Chinese and Indian immigrants during the 1800s, bringing with them their cultures and traditions, served to dilute the homogeneity of the indigenous race and ethnicity in each SEA country. These emergent divisions were worsened by the artificial territorial boundaries imposed by the colonial rulers that did not consider sociocultural factors.⁸ Thus, to this day, SEA countries continue to suffer from the incomplete sociocultural integration or mutual acceptance of different segments of their populations.

For example, Thailand and the Philippines continue to face separatist demands from Muslim minorities in southern Thailand and southern Philippines respectively due to the inability to integrate them into the mainstream political and social environment of the country. Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia have also experienced a number of racial conflicts among their diverse racial and ethnic groups for various reasons since their independence. Though such conflicts seldom occur today, historical experiences have

taught all three countries to continually manage issues of racial diversity in a careful and sensitive manner so as to promote better social cohesion in their countries.

Therefore, the sociocultural division and incomplete integration within SEA create region-wide conditions of differences, tensions, and unresolved problems that can be exploited at a transnational level for terrorist activities. However, diversity has its advantages. There is greater understanding, and therefore respect and tolerance for other societies and cultures. Properly managed and incorporated, diversity can also provide a rich multi-cultural perspective and environment within SEA that can help to moderate radical and fundamentalist attitudes in the region. The moderate form of Islam practiced by most Muslims in SEA also attests to the social and cultural sensitivities pervasive in the region.

Religious-Ethnic Factor

Fifthly, the divisions within SEA also carry a religious-ethnic dimension that matches the religious overtones of the present form of transnational terrorism. SEA has the largest Muslim population in the world, primarily located in Indonesia. Due to external influence such as the Iranian Revolution, the practice of Islam in SEA has displayed increased politicization and radicalization, as well as the adoption of extremist and violent actions to achieve political and religious aims. For example, since 1998, at least 100 politically active Islamic parties have emerged in SEA, especially in Indonesia.⁹ In addition, the unresolved problems in southern Thailand, southern Philippines, and Sulawesi in Indonesia, which have the common thread of Muslim minorities seeking

autonomy or independence from Buddhist or Christian majorities, continue to fuel the existing religious divide between Islam and the other religions.

Thus, the large Muslim population, religious-ethnic tensions, increased Islamic radicalization due to external influences, and unresolved Muslim-linked problems within the region provide fertile ground for the emergence of transnational terrorism related to Islam and the Muslim community in SEA. However, the shift toward radical and extremist Islam in SEA is not an irreversible tide. There is still a moderate Muslim majority that can potentially counter the influences of radical Islam. In addition, the Muslim community in SEA is not a homogenous entity. There are many different Islamic sects and ethnic groups that are deeply and profoundly diverse. Thus, the linkages among the different Islamic groups in SEA are tenuous, thereby weakening the basis for transnational terrorism.

Geostrategic Factor

Sixth, the geostrategic situation of SEA also increases the vulnerability of the region to transnational terrorist activities. As mentioned before, the region is historically prone to external influences due to its geostrategic location whereby its sea lanes of communications are critical to seaborne trade between Northeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East.¹⁰ From the great civilizations on both sides of the region through the colonial era and the world wars to the bipolar Cold War environment, SEA has been the center of proxy struggles among great powers. Thus, in the current global war against terrorism, SEA again presents a suitable battlefield because of the multiplicity of great power interest and involvement in the region, as well as the dispersal

of Al Qaeda elements from Afghanistan into the region. In particular, the dominant US influence in the region, which is reminiscent of SEA's colonial era, has been blamed as the cause of SEA's problems and exploited by both local and external extremist groups to galvanize actions against them.¹¹ Another vulnerability of the region is its porous geography, which makes it difficult to monitor and control covert terrorist activities on the thousands of islands straddling across SEA.¹² The porous borders between SEA countries also require a high degree of security and intelligence cooperation within the region.

However, SEA is a relatively young regional entity, making its appearance only after the Second World War. Its regional institution, namely ASEAN, has only been established since 1967 and is still in the process of developing and consolidating stable and robust cooperative mechanisms in the region. ASEAN had been making good progress in the political and economic spheres, and embarking on the security sphere with cooperation to deal with transnational crimes, until it was weakened as a regional organization by the economic crisis. As each country focused on dealing with its own political and economic problems, regional cooperation and resilience suffered.¹³ The incorporation of the relatively less developed Indo-Chinese countries into ASEAN has also contributed to the dilution of ASEAN's economic integration. Both events would serve to impede ASEAN's development into a strong and cohesive regional organization, which is a necessary condition to deal with a transnational threat.

Nevertheless, prior to the crisis, ASEAN had been an effective forum for the building of mutual understanding, confidence, and trust, and the fostering of political and economic cooperation among its member nations. For example, it was successful in

mustering its combined political and economic strength to deal with regional issues such as the Cambodian conflict between 1978 and 1991, where ASEAN upheld its corporate solidarity in challenging Vietnam's military occupation of Cambodia in 1978 and subsequently participated in the Paris negotiations that brought the conflict to an end in 1991.¹⁴ While the political, economic, and security cooperative mechanisms are still recovering and developing, ASEAN governments have displayed a willingness and commitment to cooperate in combating the threat of transnational terrorism. In the latest Eighth ASEAN Summit, ASEAN governments maintained their commitment to cooperate in the areas of intelligence exchange, border security, law enforcement, and financial cooperation. They also agreed to establish a regional Counter-terrorism Center in Kuala Lumpur.¹⁵ Though ASEAN's effectiveness remains to be seen, the potential for ASEAN to emerge in the long term as an effective and credible regional organization remains high.

The geostrategic environment in SEA makes it vulnerable and prone to external influence and manipulation, especially during a period when ASEAN's regional resilience has been weakened by the recent economic crisis. Without substantive cooperation in the near term, ASEAN will face challenges in dealing with the threat of transnational terrorism. Such conditions are favorable for the emergence of transnational terrorism. However, ASEAN's current weakness is only a temporary phenomenon. Based on ASEAN's track record and the current commitment of ASEAN governments in cooperating to combat transnational terrorism, ASEAN can develop into a stable and robust regional organization in the long term if its member nations continue to work toward improving regional cooperation and resilience.

Summary

In summary, the underlying conditions in SEA contributing to the emergence of transnational terrorism are founded on the inherent vulnerabilities of its diversity, divisions, and fractious and violent history; the developmental pains of its young political, economic, and regional institutions; and the susceptibility of the region to external influences. However, the analysis also demonstrates that these conditions are not permanent and irreversible. Embedded in these conditions are countervailing factors that can reverse the emergence of transnational terrorism if the appropriate policies are adopted to strengthen and promote them. Thus, the complex nature of the underlying conditions in SEA requires clear understanding before the formulation of policies appropriately tailored to stem the rise of transnational terrorism in SEA.

Four Selected Islamic Fundamentalist Groups

The causes of the emergence of transnational terrorism in SEA are examined through a comparative analysis of the four selected Islamic fundamentalist groups' history, goal, strategies, operations, and transnational relationships. Table 2 provides a summary of the analysis of the four groups.

History

First, the comparative history and development of the four groups reveals that transnational terrorism is both a recent externally influenced phenomenon and a desperate reaction to the limited success of current terrorist tactics in established localized

Table 2. Analysis of Four Islamic Fundamentalist Groups

Factors Groups	History	Goals	Strategies	Operations	Transnational relationship
JI	Established in 1940s; Invigorated in 1990s due to external influence.	Transnational Islamic state; Ideological root causes.	No basis for negotiation.	Clandestine cells and networks; Middle-class membership; External funding and support; Limited broad-based support.	Strong Al Qaeda linkage – resources, training, operations; Limited regional linkages – use of training bases.
KMM	Established in 1995; Gained prominence due to external influence.	Malaysia and transnational Islamic state; Ideological root causes.	No basis for negotiation.	Clandestine cells and networks; Middle-class membership; External support; Limited broad-based support.	Strong Al Qaeda linkage – resources, training, operations; Limited regional linkages – use of training bases.
MILF	Established in 1977; Largely localized; Recent transnational terrorist behavior.	Autonomous southern Philippines; Separatist and economic root causes.	Willing to negotiate.	Established command structure; Stable operating bases; Indigenous, broad-based support; Lack significant resources.	Limited Al Qaeda linkage – resources, training only; Limited regional linkages – use of training bases.
LJ	Established in 2000; Largely localized; Recent transnational terrorist behavior.	Autonomous Moluccas and Sulawesi; Separatist and economic root causes.	Willing to negotiate.	Established command structure; Stable operating bases; Indigenous, broad-based support; Lack significant resources.	Limited Al Qaeda linkage – resources, training only; Limited regional linkages – use of training bases.
Contributing causes	External influence; Limited success in localized tactics.	Regional Islamic brotherhood; Some similarities but tenuous.		Mutually supporting and reinforcing structures; Limited internal resources; Attractiveness of external support.	
Counter-vailing causes	Not indigenous; Only at the emergent stage.	More differences than similarities.		Utility relationship; Possible to sever linkages	

separatist struggles. Though JI has its roots extending back to the 1940s, it is only recently invigorated because of its external connections with Al Qaeda. Together with KMM, they became active in the 1990s after establishing linkages with Al Qaeda during the Soviet-Afghan war and receiving resources, training, and advice from Al Qaeda operatives seeking to establish a branching network in SEA. The leaders and operatives of JI and KMM have also received training from Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan.¹⁶ Therefore, external resources and influence play a critical role in the development of the JI and KMM, which leads to the embedding of transnational terrorism as a modus operandi for the JI and KMM.

On the other hand, the MILF is an established separatist group in southern Philippines since the 1970s. Over the years, it has resorted to the adoption of increasingly violent terrorist tactics such as bombings and killings of both civilian and government officials to further its goal to create an autonomous southern Philippines. Though its activities have been localized within the Philippines, MILF's limited success is pushing it toward more extreme actions. Transnational terrorism has become an attractive option because it offers external resources and support, as well as brings international attention on the MILF's cause in the southern Philippines. However, MILF has been cautious in adopting transnational terrorist tactics. It has currently limited its involvement in transnational terrorism to linkages and mutual support with other extremist groups, such as Al Qaeda and JI operatives' use of MILF bases as training camps, without conducting transnational terrorist activities. MILF has also denied linkages with Al Qaeda for fear of a severe government and international backlash.¹⁷ In a similar way, though LJ was only recently established in the 1990s, it was quick to grasp the attractiveness of external

support available by engaging in transnational activities. Recent evidence has also shown that Al Qaeda and JI operatives have trained in LJ camps in Moluccas and Sulawesi, notwithstanding denials by LJ.

Thus, the limited success in established localized separatist struggles in SEA is pushing MILF and LJ toward more extreme actions in the form of transnational terrorism to achieve their objectives. However, comparison across the four groups also demonstrates the differing degree of acceptance of transnational terrorist tactics. While the JI and KMM have fully embraced transnational terrorism, MILF and LJ have expressed caution in openly adopting transnational terrorism as their *modus operandi*. Thus, transnational terrorism remains at an emergent stage in SEA that can be curtailed with carefully tailored policies.

Goals

Second, the comparative goals of the four groups demonstrate that their transnational terrorist linkages are supported by similarities that are tenuous in nature. The regional Islamic brotherhood created by Al Qaeda and JI to provide mutual support among Islamic fundamentalist groups is a loose and non-cohesive entity. There are in effect greater underlying differences among the four groups than similarities, which reflects the diverse Muslim sects, interests, and agendas throughout SEA. Both JI and KMM's goals are transnational in scope while MILF and LJ's goals are localized and nation-based. JI aims to create an Islamic state comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, southern Thailand, and southern Philippines. While KMM's goal began with the creation of an Islamic state in Malaysia, it expanded to a transnational

goal under JI's influence. On the other hand, MILF and LJ aim to create an autonomous southern Philippines, and Moluccas and Sulawesi respectively. While the goals of the four groups appear to overlap and provide possibilities for cooperation, there remains a clear and fundamental difference between transnational and national-based goals. The leap from a national-based goal to a transnational-based one will require fundamental ideological and organizational changes that may have adverse effects on MILF and LJ's achievements thus far.

In addition, the root cause of JI and KMM's goal is primarily ideological in nature while the root causes of MILF and LJ's goals are separatist and economic in nature. The underlying dissatisfaction against SEA governments may be real and significant in some parts of SEA, but it does not extend to all SEA countries. For example, the Muslim community in Singapore was shocked to discover that Singaporean Muslims were part of the JI and plotting to disrupt the peace, stability, and progress of the country. JI and KMM's small and limited membership base also demonstrate that there is a lack of broad-based support for their goal.¹⁸ Further, the primarily middle-class membership of JI and KMM also reveals that their grievances against the existing regional and political environment are motivated mainly by ideology rather than socio-economic causes.

On the other hand, the root causes for MILF and LJ's goals have more tangible separatist and economic roots. Their dissatisfaction with the existing authorities is based on the real separatist sentiments and economic grievances of the segments of the population whom they represent. Southern Philippines, Moluccas, and Sulawesi have suffered economic and developmental neglect compared to other parts of the Philippines and Indonesia respectively. As a result, both MILF and LJ have a large membership of

15,000 and 10,000 respectively, and they also receive broad-based support from the respective population in southern Philippines and Sulawesi. Thus, their root causes have a clear and defined dimension with a specific support base. There is a stronger likelihood of MILF and LJ achieving their localized goals than JI and KMM meeting their transnational goals, since the regional governments are unlikely to give up their respective sovereign claims.

While there are some overlapping similarities among the goals of the four groups, they are at best tenuous in nature. The transnational goal of JI and KMM may incorporate the localized goals of MILF and LJ, and thereby provide for cooperative opportunities. However, it is unlikely to be able to bridge effectively the distinct transnational-national divide. Their divergent root causes, support base, and likelihood of achieving their goals in the present geostrategic reality also demonstrate that there are more fundamental differences than similarities among the groups. Therefore, the connection between transnational and local groups in SEA is likely to be limited and weak.

Strategies

Third, the different strategies adopted by the four groups serve to further accentuate their differences. The strategy of JI and KMM is rooted in the use of transnational terrorism to further their goal. They have established themselves in a position with no basis for negotiation, as the existing authorities will never accept their strategy of terror nor their unachievable transnational goal. In addition, the current actions of both groups also demonstrate that they are intent on the use of violence to alter

radically the existing political structure and environment with no intention of negotiating within it.

On the other hand, both MILF and LJ have demonstrated a willingness to negotiate with existing authorities to achieve an end-state that is acceptable to all parties. Both groups have entered into peace talks with the ruling governments to obtain autonomy and developmental aid for their respective regions. Though the peace talks have met with difficulties, some progress has been made. The Filipino government has already granted autonomy to some parts of southern Philippines while the Indonesian government is considering granting autonomy to Moluccas and Sulawesi. The strategy of MILF and LJ demonstrates that terror is used only as a secondary instrument to achieve their goals. Therefore, their shift toward the adoption of transnational terrorism is not an irreversible trend since their goals can be reasonably met.

The stark differences in strategies among the four groups serve to deepen their divisions and reflect the weak and tenuous linkages among the diverse Islamic fundamentalist groups in the region. It also demonstrates that the transnational terrorist threat is loosely connected and lacks cohesiveness. Meeting the reasonable demands of some of the groups can have the effect of weakening the bonds of transnational terrorist linkages among the various groups.

Operations

Fourth, the different operations, command organizations, and tactics of the four groups reveal mutually supporting structures that favor transnational terrorist linkages so as to exploit one another's strength and weaknesses. Influenced and trained by Al Qaeda,

JI and KMM use networks of clandestine cells to plan and conduct their operations. They possess a pervasive network of operatives throughout SEA and are able to conduct large-scale simultaneous operations on a range of strategic targets. They also function like a transnational corporation with linkages and access to substantial resources and capabilities. Their preferred tactics are bombings and killings of foreign targets, especially those of the US and their allies such as the UK, Israel, and Australia. However, as they lack freedom of movement and any permanent operating and training base, they have to send their operatives for training elsewhere, both within and outside the region. In this case, both MILF and LJ stand to match the operational deficiencies of JI and KMM.

Both MILF and LJ are legitimate and established community-level organizations with clear command and control structures. They are able to operate freely within their area of operations. More importantly, they control territories that function as their operating and training bases. Their tactics include bombings, kidnappings, and killings of civilian and government officials within their respective countries. As a primarily localized group dependent on a largely poor community, they lack the resources and funding for extensive, large-scale action against the respective ruling governments. They also do not have the operational reach to extend their activities beyond their immediate area of operations, should they wish to do so. Thus, linkages with JI and KMM prove attractive to MILF and LJ because of the availability of external access to funding, resources, and capabilities.

The mutually supporting operational structure among the four groups is perhaps one of the more direct causes of transnational terrorism in SEA. JI and KMM possesses the conduit to external funding and resources which prove extremely attractive to MILF

and LJ, while the MILF and LJ possess training bases which are indispensable to JI and KMM. Irrespective of their fundamental difference in goals and strategies, their ability to support one another's operations serves to create strong linkages among the four groups. However, the utility rather than ideological nature of such transnational linkages also reveals their inherent weakness, as it is possible to sever them by isolating their operations.

Transnational Relationships

Fifth, a further analysis of the transnational relationships among the four groups reveals the different nature and extent of these relationships. JI and KMM have established strong external linkages to Al Qaeda, particularly since Al Qaeda is primarily responsible for their revival as viable organizations. With limited support, operating, and training bases, they are also highly dependent on the resources, training, and advice provided by Al Qaeda. Though they attempt to diversify and overcome their weaknesses by building linkages with other fundamentalist groups in the region, the linkages are limited and largely utility in nature.

In contrast, while external funding and resources are attractive to MILF and LJ, neither group is dependent on these linkages for their survival and operations. With a large support base and a stable operating environment, they are able to sustain their operations without external assistance. Thus, they have both weak linkages to fundamentalist groups inside and outside of the region. In addition, they are fully prepared to deny those linkages if they impair the achievement of their goals and no longer serve their interests.

Though the external linkages of the four groups bring about the emergence of transnational terrorism in SEA, the diverse motivations and interests in establishing these linkages demonstrate inherent failings that can be exploited to curb the strengthening of these linkages.

Summary

In summary, using the comparative analysis of the four groups as a reflection of the circumstances in SEA, the causes for the emergence of transnational terrorism in the region can be attributed to the determined, resourceful, and pervasive influence from external terrorist organizations, especially Al Qaeda; the tenuous similarities but fundamental differences in ideology and goals among Islamic fundamentalist groups; the limited success of localized groups in addressing the separatist and economic root causes of problems in the region; and the attractiveness of mutually supporting operating structures, funding, and resources. However, there are inherent limitations and weaknesses in the emerging nature of transnational terrorism in SEA because of the underlying differences among the Islamic fundamentalist groups, the utility and non-binding nature of the transnational linkages, and the fundamental weakness in an external-influenced phenomenon. Thus, understanding the complexity of the goals, motivations, and linkages of the four groups will help to clarify the nature of the emergent transnational terrorism in SEA and the crafting of appropriate policies to deal with it.

Joint Analysis

A joint analysis of the underlying conditions and causes further illuminates the nature of the emerging transnational terrorism in SEA. First, transnational terrorism in SEA has limited indigenous roots. Though the inherent vulnerabilities within SEA and the tenuous similarities in goal and ideology among the Islamic fundamentalist groups have contributed to the emergence of transnational terrorism, the analysis of the four groups demonstrates that there is actually little broad-based support for transnational ideology and goal in the region. In addition, the transnational relationship among the Islamic fundamentalist groups is characterized by differences rather than similarities. Thus, the indigenous underpinnings of the recent phenomenon of transnational terrorism in SEA are weak and lacking in coherence.

Second, transnational terrorism in SEA arises on temporal and non-lasting developmental problems in the region. It has emerged on the heels of a serious disruption in the region's ongoing political and economic development. The economic crisis has both worsened the separatist and economic root causes of problems in the region, as well as severely impaired the region's ability to address them. As a result, the Islamic fundamentalist groups are pushed toward more extreme actions, including transnational terrorism, to achieve their objectives as long as these poor political and economic conditions persist. Thus, the continuation of the phenomenon of transnational terrorism in SEA will depend on the ability of the region to recover and develop stable and robust political, economic, and regional institutions.

Third, transnational terrorism in SEA displays a strong and significant external element. A combination of factors makes transnational terrorism in SEA a largely foreign

import. On the one hand, the susceptibility of SEA to external influences presents the region as a suitable alternative front for external transnational terrorist groups; on the other hand, the availability and attractiveness of external support to indigenous groups invites external influences into the region. Together with the existence of a determined, resourceful, and pervasive external transnational terrorist organization such as Al Qaeda, the stage is set for a primarily external-influenced phenomenon of transnational terrorism in SEA.

In summary, the nature of transnational terrorism in SEA displays limited indigenous roots, underpinnings of temporal and non-lasting political and economic problems, and strong external influences. It is essentially an external-influenced phenomenon with limited and weak internal coherence. The emergence of transnational terrorism in SEA is therefore not an inherent and irreversible process.

¹Lawrence E. Grinter, *Realities of Revolutionary Violence in Southeast Asia* (Alabama, Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, March 1990), 1.

²*Ibid.*, 8.

³Kurt M. Campbell and Michele A. Fluornoy, *To Prevail: An American Strategy for the Campaign Against Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2001), 275.

⁴Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, "Terrorism: Southeast Asia's Response," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 4 January 2002, 1.

⁵"Growth of Gross Domestic Product," *ASEAN*, August 2002 [chart on-line]; available from http://www.aseansec.org/macroeconomic/aq_gdp21.htm; Internet; accessed on 6 March 2003.

⁶"World Bank Supports Social Fund Project to Promote Peace and Development in Mindanao," *World Bank*, 6 December 2002 [article on-line]; available from <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:20079795~menuPK:34466~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html>; Internet; accessed on 24 March 2003.

⁷“Country Brief: Philippines,” *World Bank*, September 2002 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.worldbank.org.ph/facts.htm>; Internet; accessed on 6 March 2003.

⁸Robert C. Bone, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (New York: Random House, 1962), 3.

⁹“Gravity of Terrorism Shifting to Region,” *Singapore Straits Times*, 15 October 2002.

¹⁰Angel M. Rabasa, “Southeast Asia After 9/11: Regional Trends and U.S. Interests,” *RAND Corporation*, December 2001, 1.

¹¹ICG Asia, “Indonesia Backgrounder: How the Jemaah Islamiyah Terrorist Network Operates,” *ICG Asia Report No. 43* (11 December 2002): 2.

¹²For example, Indonesia is made up of about 13,000 islands while the Philippines is made up of about 7,000 islands.

¹³Rabasa, 4.

¹⁴Michael Leifer, *Singapore’s Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability* (London: Taylor and Francis Books Ltd, 2000), 84, 96.

¹⁵“Declaration on Terrorism by the 8th ASEAN Summit,” *ASEAN*, 3 November 2002 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.aseansec.org/13154.htm>; Internet; accessed on 6 March 2003.

¹⁶Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs, *The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism* (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs, January 2003), 6-9.

¹⁷Reyko Huang, “In the Spotlight: Moro Islamic Liberation Front,” *Center for Defense Information*, 15 February 2002, 1.

¹⁸John Gershman, “Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (July/August 2002): 68.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Taliban and Al Qaeda may have been routed in Afghanistan, but global terrorism is far from defeated. Terrorist cells, linked to global networks, exist in many countries, including in Southeast Asia. The Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist group is a stark reminder that these are not faraway problems, but immediate threats to us here and now.¹

Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong

The threat of transnational terrorism in SEA is immediate and real. The analysis of the underlying conditions in SEA and comparison of the four selected Islamic fundamentalist groups reveals the complex conditions and causes of transnational terrorism in the region. The emergence of transnational terrorism is a result of both internal and external factors. In addition, both contributing and countervailing factors exist. Thus, the answer to the question of why transnational terrorism is emerging in SEA is not as straightforward as it has been portrayed to be.

To recap, the underlying conditions and causes leading to the emergence of transnational terrorism in SEA are summarized as follows: inherent vulnerabilities of diversity, divisions, and a fractious and violent history; developmental pains of young political, economic, and regional institutions; susceptibility of the region to external influences; determined, resourceful, and pervasive influence from external terrorist organizations, especially Al Qaeda; tenuous similarities but fundamental differences in ideology and goals among Islamic fundamentalist groups; limited success of localized groups in addressing the separatist and economic root causes of problems in the region;

and the attractiveness of mutually supporting operating structures, funding, and resources.

Four key points can be concluded from the joint analysis of the underlying conditions and causes. First, though SEA possesses certain conditions and causes that lead to the emergence of transnational terrorism in the region, they are weak and lack coherence. The inherent vulnerabilities of political violence, and sociocultural and religious-ethnic divisions have not translated into significant contributing factors, nor have the similarities in goals and ideologies of the Islamic fundamentalist groups. Rather, the underlying fundamental differences among these groups serve to undermine the internal coherence of their transnational linkages. The emerging transnational terrorism in SEA can best be described as unstable and tenuous in nature.

Second, transnational terrorism in SEA is not an indigenous product; rather, it has strong external influences and arises out of temporal and non-lasting political and economic problems in the region. The economic crisis has weakened the region significantly in its ongoing political and economic development, thereby creating a temporary vulnerability that can be easily exploited by external terrorist groups. Furthermore, indigenous groups seeking to bolster their limited success with external support in funding and resources accentuate the situation. The result is the emergence of a transnational terrorism that is temporal and external-influenced.

Third, transnational terrorism is not an inherent and irreversible phenomenon. It can be effectively tackled with comprehensive and appropriately tailored policies. Such policies can focus on promoting the countervailing factors while curbing the contributing ones. Thus, a clear understanding of the nature, conditions, and causes of transnational

terrorism in SEA can provide a framework for the development of effective regional and national strategies to combat it.

Fourth, a strategy to combat transnational terrorism in SEA must incorporate a comprehensive and balanced approach to address all the contributing conditions and causes of transnational terrorism in SEA. The strategy must not focus solely on direct military or law enforcement actions against these fundamentalist groups; it should address the root causes and emphasize the battle for the hearts and minds of the Islamic community in SEA. The complex nature of the threat requires a combination of political, socio-economic, religious-ethnic, and security measures to deal with the threat effectively.

To deal effectively with the nature, conditions, and causes of transnational terrorism in SEA, a five-pronged framework is derived based on the conclusions of the thesis. The five-pronged approach is proposed as follows:

1. Minimize inherent vulnerabilities, to include the promotion of multicultural understanding and strengthening the moderate voice of Islam.
2. Maximize national and regional resilience, to include the strengthening of national and regional political and economic institutions and cooperation.
3. Address root causes, to include economic development and reasonable level of autonomy for troubled regions.
4. Cut external support, to include cooperation in intelligence, finance, law enforcement, and security.

5. Undertake appropriate direct actions, to include a mixture of law enforcement, military, and negotiation techniques to deal with the fundamentally different groups in the region.

Recommendations

With a better understanding of the nature, conditions, and causes of the emergence of transnational terrorism in SEA, it is recommended that:

1. Policy makers within and outside the region consider carefully the complexity of the nature, conditions, and causes of the emerging transnational terrorism in SEA.
2. Tailor comprehensive and appropriate policies to address the conditions and causes.
3. Consider and conduct further studies on the proposed five-pronged framework to combat transnational terrorism in SEA.

¹Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs, *The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism* (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs, January 2003), 2.

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Critical Technology (3)	/	Section 4	/	31
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